



# SONDY POPE-ROBERTS

## STATE REPRESENTATIVE

79TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

April 14, 2010

Members of the Assembly Committee on Education

I would like to thank you, fellow members, for being here today to hear testimony on Assembly Bill 943 (AB 943).

I was approached this session by several different veterans groups from around Wisconsin with a request to adopt the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. AB 943 is the result of several months of work spent making changes to the model compact provided by the Council of State Governments (CSG) so that the legislation fits the foundations and principles of Wisconsin's educational system. I was joined in my labors by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and Senator Lehman and his staff. The crux of this legislation is to ratify the Compact for Wisconsin and allow the state to serve on the Commission on Educational Opportunity for Military Children created by the participating states.

In 2006, the CSG formed an advisory group to craft an interstate compact that would address the issue of high mobility in military families. It is estimated that the average student of a military family will move twice during their high school years, and will encounter six to nine different school districts during their kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade education. These moves are not done by choice; military families face a unique situation that includes required deployments to bases around the country that frequently cross state lines. CSG's advisory committee drafted the Compact to address some of the major issues these families face when moving from state to state: the transfer of pupil records, coursework sequencing, graduation requirements, exclusion from extra-curricular activities, redundant or missed entrance/exit exams, grade level age requirements, and the power of guardians while parents are deployed.

This legislation does make three major changes to the draft compact, all of which have been approved by the United States Department of Defense who has been overseeing the implementation of the Compact throughout the country. In order of importance, AB 943 allows approval of rules promulgated by the Compact Commission by *either* the legislature or the state superintendent. In the original draft, rules promulgated by the commission would have carried the full affect of law without state approval. This change ensures that Wisconsin will have full control over its statutory law going forward. The bill also places a cap on the contribution amount for which our state is responsible at one dollar per military family student or \$1,000, whichever is less. It is estimated that Wisconsin has 500-550 military students. Without this provision, however, the state would be writing a blank check to the commission which could charge whatever it saw fit. Finally, AB 943 allows for the dissolution of the Compact and withdraw from the Commission, without the removal of the educational changes that may be made while the state is a member of the Commission.

Thank you again, fellow members, for your time and attention to this matter. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Sondy Pope-Roberts  
State Representative  
79<sup>th</sup> Assembly District

**Jim Rickel**  
**Quality of Life Regional Liaison**  
**DoD-State Liaison Office**  
**Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy**

**INTERSTATE COMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY**  
**FOR MILITARY CHILDREN – WISCONSIN – SB 681 + AB 943**

**April 14, 2010**

Honorable Chairman and members of this Committee, on behalf of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit written testimony today on the *Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children*. My name is James Rickel and I work as a team member of the **Defense State Liaison Office** operating under the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and the Deputy Under Secretary for Military Community and Family Policy. Our mission is to be a resource to state policymakers addressing the issues that affect the quality of life issues of military families.

Back in 2005, DOD, in conjunction with the Council of State Governments, and 18 other organizations, including the National Association of Elementary School Principals, National School Boards Association, the National Parent Teachers Association, the National Education Association, the state departments of education in California, Florida, Maryland, and state government reps from Nevada, North Carolina, and Alabama, over a two year period created this compact to address the educational challenges of military students who frequently transition from school to school around the world.

Before coming to work at the State Liaison Office, I worked family programs as an active member of the military for 30 years from 1976-2006 retiring from the USN as a Command Master Chief. In this capacity, I learned first hand of the educational challenges the children of our military members face as they encounter frequent school moves. As a Navy veteran of 30 years, where my children grew up in the military and presently are enrolled at Coastal Carolina University in SC and El Paso Community College, I know first hand about the challenges that the children of our military members face as they encounter frequent school moves. These challenges are of utmost importance to military families, and are consistently listed as among their top family concerns as they work to serve our nation.

As we all know, our military provides protection and defense for the U.S. and, in turn, our military children make great sacrifices. They must live with uncertainty and concern for their parents on a daily basis. Many military families learn to be flexible, but extended hours and long deployments can be difficult for military children. We can't measure their emotional stress and anxiety as their parents' prepare for deployment overseas and for war. On average, most military children will move at least twice during their high school years, and most will attend six to nine different school systems between kindergarten and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Every year, 25% to 30% of these service men and women are reassigned; many of these service members have school age children moving in and out of Wisconsin, attending schools in districts in remote areas of the state. This compact is as much about the sending state-WI-as the receiving state they moved to, to continue their education. In Essence, the compact creates for a "Comprehensive, Systematic Transition" for our military school aged children when moving from state to state, school district to school district.

These frequent moves result in some educational obstacles. Though many states, including Wisconsin have made progress in addressing these educational concerns, there is a lack of consistency *between* states that continues to create difficulties for our military families. Some of these recurring issues include kindergarten start age, participation in extracurricular activities, immunizations, timely transfer of records, placement in appropriate courses, missed or redundant entrance and exit exams, and support for children of deployed service members, and on-time graduation. Though one state may do several things right, the next move to another state can create a new set of problems since the procedures and policies are not the same as the sending state. These issues are addressed in the *Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children*.

The *Compact* is an **agreement among member states** to establish a set of practices that will allow for the uniform treatment of military children transferring between school districts and between states. The Interstate Compact does not ask for special privileges for military children; only that states create an even level playing field and remove barriers for our military school aged children, working cooperatively with other states. The language and intent of the Compact will provide consistency for our military children as they move from state to state and alleviate some of the hardship they encounter.

Though there has been some discussion among members of Congress to introduce such guidelines on a federal level, which would then be implemented by states, DoD believes states are the appropriate entities to determine and execute this type of policy in a cooperative, multi-state manner similar to the other interstate compacts that WI has adopted. Thankfully, many state leaders recognize this also. In 2008, eleven states enacted the compact, fourteen in 2009, and five thus far in 2010, bringing the total to thirty states that have enacted the compact through the legislative process signed and approved by their governor. Many more states are expected to adopt the compact in 2010. The compact is now in effect since eleven states have adopted the compact and rules and detail procedures have begun. The first interstate commission meeting was held in Mesa, AZ, October 2008 and the second in La Quinta, CA November 2009. The Council of State Governments <http://www.csg.org> is coordinating with member states future meetings. Both the Secretary of Defense and the Deputy Under Secretary fully support this compact and they are very excited about the possibilities it offers in improving the quality of life for all our military students in Wisconsin.

In summary, the compact addresses the challenges and the concerns of our military school aged children and lessens the emotional impact of moving from school district to school district. Adopting the compact will create a positive impact on our military families, which in essence, has a positive impact on our **operational readiness and our national defense and is strictly viewed as a retention and readiness issue for our military**. Remember, we enlist a single serviceman or woman and reenlist/retain a married serviceman or woman. One of the greatest factors in deciding whether or not a serviceman or woman continues on with a career in the military is the quality of education and services for their children. Adopting the compact is the step in the right direction addressing this issue.

Thank you! I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony and look forward to Wisconsin's leadership adopting this vital compact supporting our military children. Of course, I stand ready to answer any questions you may have at (915) 307-3818 or [jdricke1@yahoo.com](mailto:jdricke1@yahoo.com). Once again, thank you!

Jim Rickel  
Quality of Life Regional Liaison  
Military Community & Family Policy  
OSD-State Liaison Office  
Under Secretary of Defense